

PELVIC EXAMS AND PAP TESTS

WHAT IS A PELVIC EXAM AND PAP TEST?

Pelvic exams and Pap tests can be performed by a doctor, nurse or nurse practitioner as part of your physical checkup.

The pelvic exam and Pap test checks:

- Your reproductive organs are normal and healthy
- Whether you have chlamydia, gonorrhea, yeast, or bacterial vaginosis
- For early changes in your cervix that might indicate a medical concern (Pap test)

The preferred age to have your first Pap test is 25 years and every three years thereafter unless your health care practitioner recommends differently.

These guidelines apply to anyone with a cervix including women; pregnant people; transmen; non-binary people; people who have undergone a subtotal hysterectomy; and people who have been vaccinated with the HPV vaccine. Immunocompromised people may be at increased risk and therefore may be recommended to have annual screening.

Any visible cervical abnormalities or abnormal symptoms must be further investigated. You may receive a referral to a specialist (e.g., colposcopist, gynecologist, gyne-oncologist).

ADVANTAGES

The Pap test has greatly reduced the number of deaths caused by cancer of the cervix.

Women are at higher risk for cancer of the cervix if they:

- Are sexually active
- Begin having intercourse before the age of 20
- Have had two or more sexual partners
- Smoke regularly or are exposed to second-hand smoke
- Are not vaccinated against HPV

Pelvic exams and Pap tests only take a few minutes and could save your life. It helps to know what to expect — talk to a friend or ask a nurse.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A PAP TEST

- Make an appointment for when you don't have your period
- Don't have sex for 24 hours before the exam
- Don't use douches, gels, or tampons for 48 hours before the exam
- Empty your bladder; pee before the exam
- Talk to the nurse or doctor about any questions you may have

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- You will be asked about your health history
- To be asked when your last period began
- You will be asked to undress and cover up with a clean sheet/drape
- You will be instructed to slide to the end of the table and rest your feet in stirrups or at the end of the table
- The stirrups and sheet keep you comfortable as you spread your knees apart
- Your vulva (pubic area) is checked
- A speculum is gently inserted into your vagina; this doesn't hurt because the vagina stretches easily
- The speculum allows your cervix to be seen clearly
- Your cervix is wiped with a small brush and a cotton swab to take tiny samples of your cells
- Collected cell samples are sent to the lab to be checked for a few Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and early signs of cervical cancer
- Two gloved lubricated fingers are placed in your vagina while the other hand gently presses on your lower abdomen — this tells us the size, shape and consistency of your uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes
- You may feel some discomfort and a little pressure
- You may have some pink or brown spotting afterwards and this is normal
- The clinic will only contact you if your test indicates health concerns

Your health is your responsibility, make pelvic exams and Pap tests a routine part of healthy living.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- sexandu.ca
- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics **1-800-361-5653, # 1**
- CancerCareOntario.ca